NewsRelease

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Langley Research Center
Hampton, Virginia 23681-2199

Robert D. Allen
(757) 864-6176

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INTERVIEW OPPORTUNITY:

Stardust: NASA's First Sample Return Mission Since Apollo

NASA's Stardust mission, scheduled for launch Feb. 6 from Cape Canaveral, FL, will send a spacecraft flying through the cloud of dust surrounding the nucleus of a comet and, for the first time ever, bring cometary material back to Earth.

A team of Langley engineers helped the industry team redesign and test the Stardust sample return capsule. This capsule, the critical, final piece of the Stardust mission puzzle, must survive Earth reentry at 28,600 miles-per-hour and deliver the encased comet samples to researchers in pristine condition.

Prasun N. Desai, of Langley's Stardust sample return capsule trajectory team, will be available to media for interviews between now and Wednesday, February 3.

Stardust is the first U.S. mission dedicated solely to a comet and will be the first mission launched that will collect and return extraterrestrial material from outside the orbit of the Moon. Stardust's main objective is to capture a sample from a well-preserved comet, Wild-2 (pronounced "Vilt-2"), in Jan. 2004 and bring the comet material samples safely back through Earth's atmosphere, concluding with a parachute landing on the plains of Utah in Jan. 2006.

Press kits, high-resolution scanned images, and b-roll with 3D animation are also available.

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